



The commander of the Latvian national movement coordination center, Maj. Didzis Veidenbaums, supervises the offload of Stryker vehicles at a railhead in Garkalne, Latvia. (Photo by 1st Lt. Philip Stephens)

Expanding the NATO Movement Control Network

■ By Capt. Robert R. Yauger

Changes to global threats and Department of Defense priorities present new challenges for military forces. Logisticians must rapidly deliver personnel, equipment, and supplies to the right location at the right time and efficiently use distribution assets and networks.

Operating in Europe adds another dimension of complexity by requiring that U.S. forces work closely with

sovereign nations and abide by their governing rules for highway, air, rail, and vessel movements.

The “Strong Europe” movement network extends operational access for organic U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) and rotational forces by building multinational, interoperable capabilities with counterparts at NATO national movement coordination centers (NMCCs). The interoperability and relationships that

are developed there enhance the early entry of forces by air, ground, sea, and rail.

In January 2015, Operation Atlantic Resolve provided the 624th Movement Control Team (MCT), which was forward stationed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, an opportunity to expand the Strong Europe movement network by assigning its Soldiers to embed within NATO NMCCs.

Challenges of Moving in Europe

Personnel who have been forward stationed and required to move in Europe understand the intricacies of operating in that region. A unit cannot simply execute a convoy operation down the autobahn or across an international border without prior coordination with the proper authorities.

U.S. forces have been operating in Germany and Italy since the end of World War II and understand those nations' requirements well, but recent changes in Department of Defense priorities compel U.S. troops to transit new countries with different requirements. When operating in a new theater, U.S. forces must identify the host nation's requirements to ensure freedom of action.

Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are all NATO nations, but each of these allies has different requirements and forms that are needed to gain approval for movement. Using diplomatic clearances as an example, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) require that requests be submitted 15 days prior to movement, but Poland requires a 30-day waiting period.

Poland is geographically the largest country in the region and the only allied country that can be transited when moving to Lithuania. Therefore, Poland drives the diplomatic clearance process with its 30-day requirement because everything must cross its borders.

The major flow of forces by rail is another challenge. Poland is the only country involved in Atlantic Resolve to have the European standard 1,435-millimeter rail gauge for its railroad network. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all have the Russian rail gauge of 1,520 millimeters. In order to use the rail system from Germany to Lithuania, the cargo on the rail cars must be transloaded at the Lithuania-Poland border to rail cars that are compatible with the rest of the Atlantic Resolve rail system.

Another requirement unique to the European theater is related to hazardous materials (hazmat). To move ammunition or hazmat, units must ensure that transportation assets, loads, and drivers are all certified.

A Europe-specific course called the European Hazmat Certification (Road/Rail) is required for hazmat movements. The course is offered only in USAREUR and adds another layer of complexity for rotational forces coming into the theater. Without this training, continental United States-based forces cannot properly certify hazmat loads for movement by ground, including rail.

Even more critical to the movement of hazardous cargo, including ammunition and fuel, is the requirement to have all transportation assets certified according to the European agreement concerning the international carriage of dangerous goods by road, which is known as the ADR.

Without the certification, rotational forces are at a disadvantage and cannot operate their organic fuel trucks on the European road network. To successfully support rotational forces with this unique requirement, the MCT has to be trained and ready for all types of cargo and work closely with units to forecast their requirements.

Some common issues that are not often discussed are language and cultural barriers. Although many citizens and Soldiers of NATO partner countries speak English, the language differences sometimes cause problems.

For example, when a U.S. MCT discusses pallet positions, typically they are referring to a 463L pallet for aircraft. On the other hand, NATO movement control counterparts think of pallets as wooden warehouse pallets.

Neither is wrong, but it can be a setback in a multinational environment. No established cultural or language reference cards are available for Soldiers who are forward stationed in these countries.

Atlantic Resolve (North)

In response to Russia's military involvement in Ukraine, the United States established Atlantic Resolve (North) to reassure NATO allies of the U.S. commitment to stability in the region. USAREUR leads the Atlantic Resolve enhanced land force multinational training and security cooperation activities that take place across Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

To meet global security commitments, the United States requires strong, committed, and capable allies, which is why it has fought, exercised, and trained with European allies for the past 70 years. This strategic partnership is built on a foundation of shared values, experiences, and interests in a Europe that is stable and prosperous.

A Movement Control Shortfall

One lesson learned from putting an armored brigade combat team into the European theater was the requirement for a more robust sustainment capability, including movement control. A lack of movement control assets in Atlantic Resolve meant supported rotational units did not have visibility of the transportation assets that were bringing them critical classes of supply.

The lack of an established method for supported units to request transportation assets affected freedom of movement on interior lines. Compounding the complexity of the Atlantic Resolve theater was the requirement to work with up to seven NATO allies on their procedures and clearances for multimodal movements just to get equipment and supplies from the seaport of debarkation to the training areas.

According to Army Techniques Publication 4-16, Movement Control, "movement control is the dual process of committing allocated transportation assets and regulating movements according to command priorities to synchronize the distribution flow over lines of communications to sustain land forces."

In layman's terms, movement control is the coordination and synchronization of all movements in a respective area in order to use transportation assets effectively to facilitate the flow of cargo and passengers during the deployment, redeployment, and sustainment phases of an operation.

ment control responsibilities.”

Without an MCT on the ground for all movements, distribution operations would be severely degraded. An MCT tames the chaos of multiple requirements and ensures smooth movement operations for regionally aligned forces. It does this by being the interface for the use of

critical information.

With the cooperation of DLA Distribution Europe, the 624th MCT built trust with the supported unit by providing them with accurate reports of when their sustainment cargo would arrive and coordinating for the materials-handling equipment to offload the trucks in order for the transportation assets to meet their next approved movement window.

The true essence of a partnership is creating trust through shared cultural experiences and team building.

Movement control begins when a unit receives the mission. Long before forces and equipment arrive at the aerial, sea, or rail ports of debarkation, the movement needs to be planned. Movement control is continuous and does not stop until all forces leave the assigned theater and arrive at home station.

An example of an interruption in movement control occurred earlier this year at the Port of Riga, Latvia, where an inaccurate unit deployment list did not allow for proper planning of how to position equipment on a sea vessel. Because of the inaccuracy, many pieces had to be moved before the rest of the cargo could be downloaded. This caused a delay that required the vessel to stay at Riga longer than the contract specified.

The MCT Fills the Shortfall

An MCT has a far-reaching scope of responsibility and influence and is designed to conduct five movement control missions: intermodal, area, movement regulation, documentation, and division support. According to Army Techniques Publication 4-16, “an MCT has the capability to commit allocated transportation assets, regulate movement, and provide transportation services in a theater of operations to assist in the decentralized execution of move-

ment control responsibilities.”

Army common user land transportation assets when movement requirements exceed an organization's organic transportation capability.

With the increased operational tempo during Atlantic Resolve, partner NMCCs realized that they would not be able to sustain heightened enduring movement operations without augmentation because they would exceed their organic capabilities.

The Latvian NMCC commander, Maj. Didzis Veidenbaums, stated that the “Latvian NMCC was doing its best to coordinate movement of U.S. troops and equipment when Atlantic Resolve started. However, the intensity and tempo of operations were very high, so there was a need to have continuous coordination with our U.S. movement control counterparts.”

To ensure visibility of all movements in a theater, movement control has to involve all agencies moving through the area of responsibility. The 624th MCT sought assistance from the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Distribution Europe Transportation Division, which pushes sustainment to the Atlantic Resolve theater. Before the 624th MCT reached out to DLA, the supported unit did not know when DLA sustainment trucks were arriving, which disrupted the flow of

Embedding With the NMCCs

An issue identified from early Atlantic Resolve rotations was a need to have trained movement controllers forward stationed to serve as an interface among the 21st Theater Sustainment Command, the supported unit, and the NATO allies. Having movement controllers synchronizes deployment, redeployment, training, and sustainment operations.

In order to assure NATO allies of U.S. commitment to the peace and stability of the region, the 624th MCT was given mission command of movement control operations in Atlantic Resolve. The unit co-located personnel with their NMCC counterpart operation centers in Riga; Vilnius, Lithuania; and Warsaw, Poland.

The ability to work shoulder to shoulder was instrumental to the long-term success of Atlantic Resolve. Having the U.S. MCT embedded with NATO NMCC counterparts resulted in systems that facilitated synchronized movement, on-time paperwork submission, and communication among NATO allies, U.S. embassies, supported units, transportation units, and higher headquarters.

The Lithuanian Office of Defense coordination chief, Lt. Col. Daniel Miller, stated, “Embedding members of the 624th MCT with the Lithuanian Movement Control Center is a shining example of how true partnerships should work. Not only does it create an environment that facilitates information sharing between the U.S. and Lithuania; it smartly takes advantage of an existing organiza-



Capt. Robert Yauger speaks at the Strong Europe Movement Conference at the close of 624th Movement Control Team's Atlantic Resolve rotation. (Photo by 1st Lt. Philip Stephens)

tion with systems already in place, minimizing the manpower and effort needed for U.S. forces to accomplish their mission.”

Building partnership capability allows for operational efficiency that will enhance the early entry of U.S. forces. The 624th MCT demonstrated this by conducting a combined port operation with the Latvian NMCC that resulted in the reception, staging, and onward movement of 51 Latvian military police vehicles. The MCT seized this multinational “train while we operate” opportunity to gain experience with roll-on/roll-off vessels.

Operations are only one aspect of a partnership. The true essence of a partnership is creating trust through shared cultural experiences and team building. During their time forward stationed, the 624th MCT personnel visited with their NMCC counterparts while enjoying sporting events, museums, and outdoor activities.

Movement Conference

On March 5, 2015, the 624th MCT hosted the inaugural Strong Europe Movement Conference in Riga. For the first time, U.S. troops led a forum with Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian NMCCs to share knowledge and build interoperability.

The conference had two main purposes. The first was to establish a reoccurring event to improve movement control operations through academics and to allow critical information to flow among NATO allies, supported units, and the MCT. The second was to plan for upcoming major movements, including the 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, deployment and Operation Dragoon Ride.

During the academic portion of the conference, the 624th MCT leaders shared with the NMCCs some best practices and explained how a U.S. movement tracker ensured a common operational picture.

The NMCCs briefed their capabilities, paperwork procedures for authorizing movement, and common mistakes found on movement request paperwork.

A major accomplishment of the Strong Europe Movement Conference was the synchronization of the reception, staging, and multimodal onward movement of 100 vehicles, including Abrams battle tanks, to three different countries by rail and road. This was the first time that a U.S. flagged vessel discharged cargo directly at the Port of Riga, and the event had worldwide media attention. This operation exercised the interoperable capabilities of U.S. and NATO movement controllers.

The conference also served to resolve problems with Operation Dragoon Ride requirements among the Baltic countries and their respective U.S. embassies, the U.S. MCT, and supported units. Operation Dragoon Ride was a 10-day, 1,800-kilometer



An M1A2 Abrams tank rolls off the Liberty Promise roll-on/roll-off vessel and prepares for onward movement by rail. (Photo by Capt. Robert R. Yauger)

road movement from Estonia to Germany through Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Czech Republic, making it the longest vehicular movement in Eastern Europe since World War II. The synchronization of the U.S. MCT and its NATO NMCC counterparts played a huge role in the success of the operation.

The participating nations (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) were pleased to have a forum in which to exchange ideas for major operations, such as a rotational forces deployment and redeployment or a road march through six countries. Overall, the Strong Europe Movement Conference demonstrated that communication is the key to success in multinational operations.

A formal partnership with the Atlantic Resolve NMCCs assures partner nations of continued U.S. support to the region. These mutually supporting partnerships can help fill operational gaps and shortfalls

among the nations. These partnerships will lead to a NATO command in which U.S. forces will augment and participate under a multinational commander. This concept would apply not only to U.S. personnel but to U.S. equipment as well. Developing a multinational trailer transfer point would be an example of testing U.S. equipment to validate true interoperability.

NATO education is critical to U.S. mission success. U.S. movement controllers have to learn the Logistics Functional Services system, which standardizes NATO movements, and also take classes at NATO schools to allow Soldiers and leaders to focus on NATO language. As it stands right now, NATO allies and U.S. Soldiers do not speak an interoperable logistics language. Understanding one another is essential to gaining and maintaining operational access.

The foundation has been laid for the Atlantic Resolve movement

network; now it must be nurtured, expanded, and challenged. Newly formed partnerships require attention to detail and continued trust. Taking advantage of NATO schools, seeking opportunities to validate true multinational operations, and ensuring equipment compatibility are just some ways to continue to enhance the network.

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